

MEDITATIONS ON GOD'S DIVERSE FAMILY

31 DAYS OF DEVOTIONAL READINGS



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Produced by
The Board of Christian Education
Rev. Luke Brad Bobo, Ph.D., Chair

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FOREWARD



Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and light unto my path...

Like little children needing direction and reassurance from loving parents, each one of us as Christians will find ourselves in need of the same nurture from our Heavenly Father. We go astray, experience disappointment and often encounter demoralizing circumstances. We need to hear from our Heavenly Father.

We believe that God still speaks.

As we endeavor to practice the spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith, we experience God in fresh and exhilarating ways. Through prayer, bible study, church participation and everyday life experiences we all can hear from God. The requirement is that we be still and devote our attention to Him.

This book of devotional readings from scripture centering on Family is the product of the Board of Christian Education under the leadership of our Minister of Christian Education Rev. Dr. Luke Bobo. The members of Friendship are the actual writers of the material. We commend the team of contributors for their outstanding commitment to the Kingdom.

The inspirational words herein seek to address and affirm the diversity of the contemporary family unit as well as the many and varied life experiences of Christian families today.

May you be inspired, instructed and uplifted by each daily bible reading.

James A. Terrance, Jr.

Pastor

Table of Contents

FOREWARD.....	i
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GOD’S DIVERSE FAMILIES’ DAYS

GOD’S DESIGN FOR THE FAMILY.....	1
THE IMPORTANCE OF EXTENDED FAMILY.....	2
A FAMILY’S BLESSING FROM GOD: THE BIRTH OF A CHILD	3
SINGLE PARENTING WITH GOD’S HELP.....	4
A SINGLE MAN WITH FAMILY-RESPONSIBILITIES.....	5
ADOPTED BY GOD.....	6
GRANDPARENTS REARING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN	7
A CHOSEN FAMILY	8
DIVORCED PARENTS	9
BE LIKE PAUL: A MESSAGE TO SINGLES.....	10
FOSTER FAMILIES.....	11
FAMILIES WITH A MILITARY FAMILY MEMBER	12
THE VILLAGE: THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF YESTERDAY	13
AN INCARCERATED PARENT	14
DYSFUNCTIONAL VS. HEALTHY BLENDED-FAMILIES	15
GOD: A DEFENDER OF WIDOWS.....	16
HOMELESS FAMILIES	17
GROWING-UP FAST: EMANCIPATED MINORS	18
CO-HABITATING.....	19
AN EMPTY NEST (Part 1).....	20
AN EMPTY NEST (Part 2).....	21

FAMILY CHALLENGES

THE DIFFICULTY OF MARRIAGE.....	22
ONLY YOU	23
TRUST IN THE GREAT PHYSICIAN: COPING WITH CANCER	24
A FAMILY’S CRISIS: COPING WITH DEATH.....	25

CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALS

DON’T LOOK BACK.....	26
DON’T LISTEN TO FOOLISH TALK.....	27
A PARENT’S RESPONSIBILITY...TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT GOD..	28
FAMILY TIME: EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY	29
BENEFITS OF A FAMILY HAVING A PRAYER LIFE.....	30
WHATEVER IT IS, GIVE IT TO GOD.....	31
DEVOTIONAL GUIDE SUBCOMMITTEE.....	INSIDE BACK COVER
THE ROMAN ROAD (PLAN OF SALVATION).....	BACK PAGE

GOD'S DIVERSE FAMILIES



GOD'S DESIGN FOR THE FAMILY (Day 1)

Key Verse: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'" Genesis 1:28a [ESV]

Read: Colossians 3:18-21

Webster's Dictionary defines the adjective **intact** as, not damaged in any way, having all parts, whole. The noun **family**, also defined by Webster, is a fundamental social group in society, consisting of a man, woman and their offspring; a group of people sharing common ancestry. The theological definition of an "intact family" can be traced back to the Old Testament book of Genesis, where the concept of family was first introduced to Adam and Eve. As we see in Genesis 1:26-28 [ESV], "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'" God's plan for creation was for men and women to marry and have children (Genesis 2:24), and they with their children would become an "**intact family**."

Some examples of an "intact family" in scripture are: (1) When God saved Noah from the flood, it wasn't an individual case of salvation, but a salvation for him, his wife, his sons and his sons' wives. In other words, his entire family was saved (Genesis 6:18); (2) When God called Abraham out of Haran, He called Abraham and his family (Genesis 12:4-5). God's covenant with Abraham was familial, not individual.

Therefore, an "intact family" is the most important building block of human society, and as such, should be nurtured and protected. More important than that is the **spiritual family**, the *Church*, made up of all people who call upon the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. This is an *in-tact family* drawn "From every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9 [ESV]), and the defining characteristic of this "**intact family**" is **love for one another**.

God never intended for man to nullify the importance and roles set forth in scripture of what an "**intact family**" should resemble. Our role as Christians is to teach our generations to comprehend the importance and benefits of being an "**intact family**" which is housed under God's umbrella of favor and generational blessings.

Prayer: Thank you, dear God, for my spouse and my children. Let us grow together in the understanding of the Lord; give us patience with one another to understand that we will not always get along, but that it's okay to have differences and to still love one another. Amen.

FJD

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXTENDED FAMILY (Day 2)

Key Verse: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6 [KJV]

Read: I Timothy 5:1-5

The family unit, created by God is one of the greatest blessings we have been given. From the creation of the first man and woman, the extended family has evolved. The nuclear family can rest assured knowing that they will not have to face life's problems alone. Extended family members, whether living in the nuclear home or somewhere else, are an integral part of the family and it is important for family members to develop and maintain strong connections with one another, and to spend quality time together.

The parents of the nuclear family are responsible for instilling and teaching their children good sound values and Christian virtues. Even though parents do teach their children about the Lord and how to live, there are times when parents will need support and assistance from extended family members. Remember, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Extended members play an important role in the nurturing and development of children. Extended family members, whether grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins, can provide emotional and physical support. They usually can be trusted and often turn out to be close friends. Extended family members possess various skills that are valuable to the family. By utilizing some of the nuclear family's skills, support, and/or time, some stress in the family can be alleviated and some of the parents' workload may be lightened. Having extended family members close can help children to learn how to respect and appreciate elders, other family members, and ancestors. Children will practice what they see and remember what they are taught. Some extended family members may also hold familial and Godly wisdom. Parents taking their responsibility seriously will teach their children God's ways and will enable their children to learn God's will for their lives. Sometimes when children won't listen to their parents, they may be more apt to listen to other adult relatives.

Prayer: Lord, help us to be the kind of parents that you would have us to be. Thank you for our extended family and let them be a blessing to our children and our family. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SAW

A FAMILY'S BLESSING FROM GOD: THE BIRTH OF A CHILD (Day 3)

Key Verse: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Hebrew 12:11 [NIV]

Read: Psalm 127:3, Jeremiah 1:5, Luke: 2:40, Isaiah 54:13, Mark 10:14, Proverbs 13:24

I so vividly remember the day our child was born. God blessed my husband and me with a bundle of joy and she continues to bring happiness to us today. Watching her grow from an infant to a "Fruit of the Spirit" Christian young lady has been rewarding. We encouraged and nurtured her to demonstrate characteristics of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22-23 and Proverbs 22:6). Today, she is one of our greatest gifts from God! Parents should be committed to be visible and viable role models, who work to enhance and build their child's intellectual, physical, social, and religious development. Demonstration and application of life building skills of love, respect, devotion, guidance, understanding, patience, discipline and involvement, as well as provisions to provide food, shelter, and clothing can equip parents to engage in effective parenting skills. I offer this poem as a suggestive message to parents in the rearing of a child.

I gave you life, but I cannot live it for you.
I can give you love, but I cannot force it upon you.
I can teach you things, but I cannot make you learn.
I can give you directions, but I cannot always be there to lead you.
I can teach you right from wrong, but I cannot always decide for you.
I can teach you to share, but I cannot make you unselfish.
I can teach you respect, but I can't force you to show honor.
I can advise you about friends, but I cannot choose them for you.
I can tell you the facts of life, but I can't build your reputation.
I can warn you about drugs and drinking alcohol beverages, but
I can't prevent you from using them.
I can tell you about lofty goals, but I can't achieve them for you.
I can teach you kindness, but I can't force you to be gracious.
I can warn you about sins, but I can't make you morally accept these values.
I can pray and encourage you to accept Jesus as your Savior but
I cannot make you walk with God and accept him.
I can only pray that God will lead, guide and order your steps.
I am accountable to God!

(Pathfinders and Parent to Child, Source/Author Unknown)

Our child is that special person you held in your arms and now you hold in your heart! She is dear to us!

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for your creation of family and children. Help us to obey your Holy Word, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6 [KJV]. Amen.

SINGLE PARENTING WITH GOD'S HELP (Day 4)

Key Verse: "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6 [ESV]

Read: Psalm 3:1-6

There are two **single** women here at Friendship Baptist Church, who single-parented. They are very visible and remain active today and they demonstrate a Christian walk with God. Most of us know them very well. They are mother and daughter. I believe these women were very successful in parenting, simply because they put God first in their lives. The **mother single** handedly raised a granddaughter, while her **daughter single** handedly raised her son.

They were family, but each lived in their own home. They religiously brought their granddaughter and son to Sunday School, children's choir rehearsal, and nearly everything offered for children. They also brought their children to any activity that promoted spiritual growth at the church, constantly teaching them the benchmarks for their spiritual growth and teaching God's word and expectations. They taught their granddaughter and son about having a personal relationship with God. All through their formative years the **single grandmother** and **mother** were molding these children into being productive young people.

Even in high school they both were recognized as top students in their school; they both were in the Honor Roll Society. These women emphasized education and provided for extra-curricular activities. Also, these young people both received top scholarships from the church, upon their graduation from high school, which they could use at the college of their choice. These scholarships recognize both academic performance and church participation. Now both of these young adults have gone on to finish college, earning Bachelors' and Masters' degrees. They're both living and working out of state as productive Christian citizens. The solid Christian upbringing and biblical training provided by this **single-parent and grandparent contributed to the success of these young people.** Yes, **single Christian parenting** can be productive.. **These are Christian woman!**

Do you know of members in your congregation who are single-parenting? Have you noticed the conduct and behavior of his or her child? Have you observed the child to be well-mannered? If it seems as though the parent needs assistance, why not encourage her or him. Get to know him or her, so they can trust you to be a Christian source of support and encouragement, as well as a resource to assist in giving their child Biblical training and even practical help such as babysitting.

Prayer: Lord, the thought of single parenting can be overwhelming. But you can set one's life in motion and prepare a particular path for all to walk and move forward with the opportunity to succeed when we obey your word. Amen

A SINGLE MAN WITH FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES (Day 5)

Key Verse: “Any who does not provide for their relatives and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (I Timothy 5:8) [ESV]

Read: Isaiah 40:30-31

What happens when parents divorce or when two people in a relationship who have children break-up? Does this mean that the man no longer has any responsibility? On the contrary, it means that the responsibility for their children’s well-being increases. Absentee fathers or those who are not around their children as much have more of a responsibility to tend to their children’s spiritual and emotional needs, to ensure they are receiving the proper upbringing and education in the Bible. Proverbs 22:6 [ESV] tells us that we should, *“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

When some men break up with the mothers of their children, they fall into despair, thinking they will no longer have any influence on their children; other men act as if they divorce or “break-up” with their own children. The Bible teaches that influence comes through leading by example, *“...and these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk to them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise (Deuteronomy 6:6-7 [ESV]).”*

Just because men are not in their children’s lives as much does not mean they should give up hope. In every instance when they are present in their lives, though, men need to give it their all. Deuteronomy 11:19 [ESV] says, *“You shall teach them to your children, talking to them when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down and you rise.”*

While the Bible does not appear to offer a definitive word on a single man’s obligations to his children, it does definitively state what a man’s role is: he is supposed to lead them and bring them to Christ. *“But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and head of Christ is God (I Corinthians 11:3 [ESV]).”* As heads of the household regardless if the mother and father are together, man’s responsibility is STILL to his family. I Timothy 3:3 [ESV] goes further by stating that, “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” Biblically-based father’s, even if they are single, should influence and lead.

The Bible also states that fathers are supposed to be humble and not resentful with their child-rearing. Ephesians 6:4 states, *“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instructions of the Lord.”* A parallel passage in Ephesians 5:25 [ESV] reads, *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.”* God holds fathers to high standards. Remember if you’re not around for your children, there will be no one to teach your son to be a man and your daughter may look for love in the wrong places with the wrong men. Fathers are essential in raising healthy children to become healthy adults.

Prayer: Lord, I ask that you watch out for our children and their mothers; though we may have differences, if they are doing well it means that my children are also doing well. Bless them with the same wisdom and patience that I would ask you to give to me. Amen.

FJD

ADOPTED BY GOD (Day 6)

Key Verse: “...Pharaoh’s daughter adopted him [Moses] and brought him up as her own son. And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds.” Acts 7:21-22 [ESV].

Read: Ephesians 1:3-10

There are many kinds of families, including families in which one or more of the children are adopted. The first mentions of adoptions in the Bible include Abraham’s adoption of Eliezer (Genesis 15:2,) Jacob’s (i.e., Israel’s) adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:5) and Pharaoh’s daughter’s adoption of Moses (Exodus 2:5-10). As in these cases, children are adopted for a variety of reasons. Some children are adopted, because the parents cannot have natural children: Abraham’s adoption of Eliezer was because he and Sarah seemed to be unable to bear children. Other children are adopted because unmarried single individuals want to have children and/or want to share their love and resources—like Pharaoh’s daughter adopting Moses—providing him the privileges, resources and education of the palace. Others like Jacob, who adopted his grandsons, passed on his family and spiritual blessings to his son’s (Joseph’s) sons. Like any type of parenting, adoptions can be a blessing and/or a challenge to both the parents and the children.

Children who are adopted have all the rights and privileges that natural children have. The greatest adoption of all is when we are saved; we become God’s daughters and sons—the adoption of God: The children of grace (Galatians 4:4-7). Moreover, along with Jesus Christ, we become co-heirs of God’s riches in eternity.

Prayer: Dear God, We Praise your Holy Name. Lord bless those who open their home to children, who are not biologically their progeny. Please allow these families to knit seamlessly together. Thank you for restoring our relationship with you. And most of all thank you for the promise of eternal life. In the mighty and majestic name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

LEB

GRANDPARENTS REARING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN (Day 7)

Key Verse: “Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the glory of children is their fathers.” Proverbs 17:6 [ESV]

Read: Isaiah 46:3-5

We get it. Grandparents have reared their children, have eagerly anticipated them leaving, and are now having the time of their lives being empty-nesters. Being retired. Living in peace. However, just because grandparents are retired that shouldn't mean they aren't actively involved with their grandchildren. As the African saying goes, “...it takes a village to raise a child...” The same thing can be said about grandparents. Proverbs 13:22 [ESV] tells us that “...a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous.” Many equate wealth with money, but wealth can also be wisdom. Why not invest it in your grandchildren? With so many things happening now-a-days, danger lurks around every corner and parents can only do so much. Yet, if a grandparent steps in to help, the difference can be amazing, particularly because of the wisdom of the grandparent. Titus 2:2-4 [ESV] says, “*Older men are to be sober-minded dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slave to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children.*” Because of these regal perspectives, grandparents often see the bigger picture that their children don't. Frequently, grandparents have become more patient with children. These are additional reasons for them to be involved. At other times, the grandparents literally becomes the parents; for example, if their child dies, is incarcerated, abuses drugs, or the state takes the grandchildren out of their child's home, the grandparent becomes the grandchildren's guardian, which is often preferred over foster-care with a stranger. Grandparents sometimes have adopted their grandchild.

The biggest things that grandparents can provide to their grandchildren are a sense of origin, a sense of belonging. They know the history of the family—which can boost self-esteem and self-worth in children—and something that the Bible directs them to tell. “Only take care, and keep your soul diligently; lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children (Deuteronomy 4:9 [ESV]).

Prayer: God, please watch over my grandchildren. Let them understand that knowledge does not necessarily equate to wisdom. Teach them patience; teach them that, though the world isn't fair, through prayer and your guidance they can persevere through anything. Amen.

FJD

A CHOSEN FAMILY (Day 8)

Key Verse: “...Don’t urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” Ruth 1:16 [NIV].

Read: Ruth 1:15-19

Often people from abusive, dysfunctional, and/or substance abusing families recognize that they have little in common with their family of origin. At other times, the biological family is so unhealthy or toxic that it is best that an individual not have a close relationship with them. Others may not have a relationship with family, because, they don’t have living or involved family members.

Even though, one may not be able to have a relationship with one’s own family, most people have a desire for close or loving connections. An option is to create family. Many Black families consist of friends, sometimes called play-mothers, play-dads, play-brothers, play-sisters, and/or play-cousins or godmothers, godfathers, god-brothers and god-sisters (not at christening but by choice). Some of us have asked how certain family, who we have always called aunt or uncle, is related to us; to find out that the individual is not a blood relative but a very close friend, who has been claimed as family. Prior to the 1980’s, when sociologists and mental health professionals investigated Black families; these chosen families were considered to be negative; however, as these created families were further studied, they were determined to be a strength of African American culture. In addition, 12-Step programs, such as Alcoholics’ Anonymous (AA) encourage members to create a supportive group of individuals—a family of sorts.

Long ago, Ruth and Naomi demonstrated that true love and commitment aren’t about blood relations but about making an active decision to be family. So if your family of origin is toxic, wounding, or distant, claim family-like relationships with loving, like-minded people. Paul, who said that Rufus’ mother was like a mother to him (Romans 16:13), also had this type of “family” relationship.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for teaching us that family is more than just blood relatives. We appreciate our friends and spiritual family. Amen.

LEB

DIVORCED PARENTS (Day 9)

Key Verse: “Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” Isaiah 26:3 [KJV]

Read: I Thessalonians 5:17; Isaiah 26:2-4

When we are dreaming about marriage and trying to decide if we should get married or not; we tend to talk to parents, friends, and everybody but God. Many people who get married are Christians who love the Lord and are faithful church workers, who know the power of prayer. Yet they find themselves married, parents and then divorced. God sometimes gives us the desires of our hearts to teach us that everything that we ask for may not be what’s best for us. Many couples seeking marriage do so because of physical feelings, sense of security, the fear of being alone in later life, and/or the desire to have children. Many times we fail to ask God to send us the right mate for us. Mark 11:24 [KJV] says, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” If couples fail to approach the institution of marriage Godly and prayerfully it is very likely to end in divorce.

Years ago I came in contact with a Christian woman who was married at twenty-one, a parent at twenty-three, and divorced at thirty five. She stated that she was devastated, tearful, depressed, and constantly asking herself why she couldn’t keep her marriage together. She questioned her Christianity so frequently that she decided to visit a well-known therapist to talk. Determined to get her life back together, to be the mother that God wanted her to be, this woman made an appointment. The day of the appointment she walked into the office, introduced herself, sat down and began to explain why she was there. She was interrupted by a gentle, quiet voice that said, “Shall We Pray.” The sound of the therapist’s quiet voice caused tears to well up in her eyes and flow down her cheeks. After hearing the words “Amen”, the woman heard “God loves you and he knows what you need. He understands your pain and through prayer you will find peace and get back on the right track”. Isaiah 26:3 [KJV] says “Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.” You can never go wrong when you pray, ask God to send you a mate, and then wait for His answer. Trust Him.

Prayer: Dear Father, Help us to bring our needs and desires to You as we seek Your will for our lives. Forgive us for our disobedience. We thank You for Your grace and mercy, and in all things we give You the praise. Help us to pray and study more as we walk with you daily. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

SAW

BE LIKE PAUL: A MESSAGE TO SINGLES (Day 10)

Key Verse: “Now to the unmarried and the widow I say: It is good to stay unmarried as I [Paul] do.” I Corinthians 7:8 [NIV]

Read: I Corinthians 7:8, 32-35

In a previous era, “Old Maid” or “Spinster” were negative labels for unmarried women. Single men and women of a certain age are sometimes viewed with suspicion and are met with prying questions. Single people sometimes view themselves as less than their married counterparts, feeling disregarded by society and even the church.

Ironically, Paul, the primary writer of the New Testament, suggests that singlehood is the preferred status. Specifically, he notes that singles can more readily focus their attention and energy on doing God’s work and carrying out His mission.

What is overlooked is that there are not only advantages to being married but there are advantages to being single. Singles have a freedom to do what they want, how they want, when they want. There is little need to compromise with others in terms of life decisions; however, for Christian singles, this needs to be within the perimeters of God’s laws and will. For decades, happiness researchers have found that single, childless women are the happiest individuals of all; even though, society has led singles to think they’re not happy. Paul said “...for I have learned in whatever situation I am in to be content (Philippians 4:11b [ESV]).” Singles must embrace singleness; cultivate friendships, and be actively engaged in pleasurable and enriching activities. Most of all, conform your life to the will and purpose of God, utilizing your God given gifts and talents for His glory.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Help us to recognize our own value and the value of our single sisters and brothers. Give us contentment in our situations. Please be with us all as we do the work that You have ordained for us to do, in order to bless others and further Your Kingdom. Amen.

LEB

FOSTER FAMILIES (Day 11)

Key Verse: “But my God shall supply all of your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19 [KJV]

Read: Philippians 4:19; II Timothy 2:15; I Thessalonians 5:17

As a child, I woke up each morning knowing that I was safe, and as an adult, I continue to be blessed and loved by such a wonderful family, whom I cherish. Not every family can testify to feelings of being safe, loved, and nurtured. As Christians we must witness, study the Word of God and live right so that people will see Christ in us. This can lead them to want to know more about Jesus and how He provides for us. We are God’s hands and ambassadors. God is calling some of our Christian brothers and sisters to open up their loving homes to help supply the needs of the less fortunate. One possibility of sharing God’s blessings is by being a foster-parent.

Foster families come about when biological families have failed or have to be interrupted, in order for parents to work on family or personal situations. Children are taken out of their homes and placed into foster families when it is determined that they are being abused, placed in dangerous situations or not being adequately cared for. When children’s lives are interrupted and they are placed into an alternate setting that doesn’t always mean that they will be safe, cared for or loved. Foster homes are human and have their problems. Children sometimes go from foster home to foster home because of the children’s behavior or complaints of mistreatment and abuse. Not all foster parents are Christians. Without Christ as the head of the family, chaos and problems are more likely. Most foster children haven’t known stability and have been betrayed by the adults in their lives; thus, many foster-children probably don’t believe that God is trustworthy, steadfast or loves them. Children first view God in the way their first caretakers have treated them. If we become foster-parents, we must consistently demonstrate our love and dependence on God. I Thessalonians 5:17 [KJV], tells us to “Pray without ceasing.” We must pray and teach our children/foster-children how to pray and talk to God, and that He is never too busy and always available. Whatever is needed in the family, God has it and He can and will supply all of our needs.

Prayer: My Heavenly Father, Thank You for giving us a Savior who loves us and always intercedes for us. When we are feeling alone and unloved help us to remember that the Holy Spirit is always there. If it is your will for me to be a foster parent, please help me to hear your call. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

SAW

FAMILIES WITH A MILITARY FAMILY MEMBER (Day 12)

Key Verse: “For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe.” Psalm 61:3 [KJV]

Read: Psalm 61:1-3

Going into the military with a family can be an exciting adventure that can take the family all over the world; however deployments, reintegration into the family, constant moving around, lack of friends nearby, lack of close support systems, loneliness, childhood depression, and limited quality family time are concerns for military families. When one or both parents are separated from their children for long periods of time, anxiety can set in with the children. Moreover, a change in behavior that interferes with communications or any area of the children’s lives may arise. Some children who live in military families may exhibit maladjusted behaviors and act out more because of family interruptions, instability and inconsistency.

Our military system is responsible for the world’s protection and we should be grateful to the men and women of the military. Military members are sometimes in danger and often times lonely. The military provides materially for the family but more is needed to keep the family supported and healthy. Christian military parents do have a handle to hold on to when they need it, but it is still difficult for them to maintain a stable, harmonious family with one or both parent(s) gone long periods of time and not knowing where their loved one has gone or when they will return. Philippians 4:19 [KJV] says “But my God shall supply all of your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”. Military parents need to know Jesus and have a personal relationship with Him. They need to pray, study the word of God, teach the children what God expects of them and model the qualities of Christ. On those lonely, dark nights when your spouse or parent is gone and you are troubled, call on Jesus and thank Him for answering your prayer. When a parent returns after being deployed both members of the couple must be aware that the power dynamics of the family change, and God’s guidance is necessary to recalibrate and strengthen the family.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for providing dedicated military personnel to protect us. Please bless them and their families. Teach us all to seek and read Your Word in our daily living. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

SAW

THE VILLAGE: THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF YESTERDAY (Day 13)

Key Verse: “Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away.” Proverbs 27:10 [ESV]

Read: Acts 2:42-47

There was a time when the **neighborhood** had the spirit of family. In this day and time, we call it **“the village.”** Then, nearly every neighbor was friendly and knew one another or someone in that household by their name as well as their children’s name and even their dog’s name. Children played together outside and visited each other’s’ homes.

Everyone spoke, **“hello”**, or **“waved”** their hands at each other coming and going. Then, people were compassionate toward one another. They were concerned about their well-being, as well as the health and needs of the neighbors. Neighbors were willing to assist in any way that they could. How time has changed, for today we know not our neighbors.

Trust was the thing; parents could leave their children in the care of their neighbor and know that they were in good hands. They fed them if they thought they were hungry or just had not eaten. They could scold neighborhood children to correct him if they saw him misbehaving in a way that they knew their parents would not permit. This was the trust and faith neighbors of yesterday had for one another.

This occurred because most read and were taught Bible principles in their homes and most attended church and had love and respect in their heart for others. On Sunday morning, you could see the families leaving their homes to attend their various churches on Sunday mornings. Through the week, you knew your neighbors were going to Bible Study, choir rehearsal, or other church activities. Sometimes neighbors would ask if your child could go with them. This is something we hardly see in our **neighborhoods** today. Families leaving their homes, on Sunday mornings on their way to church for worship have become rarer. That was the village that is spoken of today. It was how **“a village”** helps raise a child in the **neighborhood**.

Why not make it a point to know your neighbors and invite their family to attend worship service at your church on Sunday?

Proverbs 27:10 [ESV] states, “Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother who is far away.”

Prayer: Our Lord and Our God, bring back the days when there were villages and neighborhoods, in which people of all kinds lived together in unity. Please let the church family become the village of today. Amen.

CEH

AN INCARCERATED PARENT (Day 14)

Key Verse: "...I was in prison and you came to visit me." Matthew 25: 36c [NIV]

Read: Matthew 25:31-46 (n.b., 35-40)

God gives us free will to make our own decisions and sometimes because of our actions we find ourselves in unfortunate situations that have lasting impacts on our lives and families. Parents who lose their freedom and serve time in jail or prison are harshly judged by society and have a hard time reentering into their communities when they are released. While imprisoned they lose their freedom by being locked up. They can't vote; they sometimes lose their self-respect and the respect of their families. At other times, the parent is falsely accused of something that they didn't do; but that doesn't matter. Society still looks down on that parent and steers away from him or her, instead of trying to help the newly released parent reintegrate into society. Families with incarcerated parents often have traumatized children, who may feel unloved, show aggression, and live lives that are counterproductive to society. They attribute their failures to not having their parents around when they need them. They live with the stigma of parents in jail. It is demeaning and a lonely life for families. Researchers have found the imprisonment of a parent is traumatic for the children and has a long-term negative effect.

In Matthew 25:35-40 Jesus speaks to the righteous as he talks about the "least of these." He is referring to people in a variety of needy situations that include the hungry, thirsty, impoverished, sick and imprisoned. Jesus refers to the *least* as Christ's "brothers" and that Christians caring for the needy are not just serving people but they are also serving Him. Christians who see their brothers and sisters in need and choose to ignore or not help them are condemned by Jesus. People who are jailed or incarcerated have made mistakes and so have we, but our mistakes did not land us in jail or prison. We must remember that Romans 3:23 says [KJV] "...All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God." God loves and forgives us and we must extend the same acts of charity to our brothers and sisters that God extends to us. God has always shown a concern for the poor and needy and as Christians we must go the extra mile to show our concern and care for others.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for providing the ultimate example of love by sending Your only Son—Jesus Christ—to earth to atone for our sins. We give YOU all the praise as we worship You in spirit and in truth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SAW

DYSFUNCTIONAL VS. HEALTHY BLENDED-FAMILIES (Day 15)

Key Verse: “Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord...” Psalm 127:3a [ESV]

Read: Psalm 127

Bringing two or more families together to live is hard because the individual families had different rules, value systems, expectations, and customs. You have children from divorce, single parent homes, abusive homes, adopted homes and other types of environments living at some point in time together. Because of their past life, they might bring emotional pains to the new family. Extended families living under the same roof have a lot of work to do in order to dwell and communicate in an effective, healthy way. Children previously from single parent or neglectful homes may have taken on the role of the other parent, and may have difficulty relinquishing these roles and just be children. Children may feel disloyal if they attach to a new stepparent or may feel jealous that their parent shares his or her attention and affection with their new spouse. In blended families, biological parents often become extremely protective of their biological child and often don't want to share discipline of their own children. A family, no matter what type it is, cannot become whole and positive without having Christ as the head. Even though the leader of the family, whether dad or mom, is a Christian and has a desire to live in peace and harmony in the home, it remains a huge challenge. Harmony will only happen if the leaders in the family put Christ first, study the Word, and continually seek God's will for their lives and their family. Philippians 2:5 [KJV] states “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” Also, first the parents and then with the children must openly and freely communicate with each other about their hopes, expectations, feelings and difficulties of integrating into a new family unit.

Parents in blended families through prayer must teach the children how to study the word of God and how to pray. Studying the Word is the blueprint to what is expected of each family member. Once a pattern of studying together is established then everyone in their own way should begin communicating with God and building a relationship with Him in order to better themselves in the family and become more positive. Philippians 4:13 [KJV] says “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Families who pray together stay together. God is a God of second chances and even though life dishes out pain, unhappiness and chaos in families; if we trust in the faithfulness of God; we have the assurance that He will forgive our mistakes, restore our families to peace and harmony, and bless their efforts. Dysfunction can become functional and healthy with Christ.

Prayer: Dear God, Forgive us for not seeking Your will for our families and communicating more with You. Thank You for forgiving our sins and giving us another chance to follow Your commandments. Help us to be more like You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

SAW

GOD: A DEFENDER OF WIDOWS (Day 16)

Key Verse: “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling. God set the lonely in families.” Psalm 68:5-6a [NIV]

Read: Psalm 68:4-10

Jemima Byrd, the long-time president of the Women’s Missionary Union (WMU) of our church and her good friend, Annie Lee Price, the former Director of our church’s Baptist Training Union (BTU), were extremely active in every facet of church life. Neither Mrs. Byrd nor Mrs. Price had children of their own, but they both loved and were loved by our church family.

I believe that Ms. Price was widowed as long as I knew her. Mrs. Byrd lost her beloved husband, Deacon Byrd, in the latter years that I knew her. A while after she was widowed, Mrs. Byrd’s health began to fail. She had no children or close relatives to look after her; however, her husband’s niece stepped-up and took Mrs. Byrd in and cared for her. Then, Mrs. Price’s health failed. She found herself in a predicament with neither children nor close relatives to oversee her care. Her friend’s niece by marriage also stepped-up to care for and take-in Mrs. Price.

These two elderly God-fearing friends probably couldn’t have imagined that this kind, generous soul would have chosen to be their caretaker and *family*. She was like Ruth, who said, “...Where you go I will go, where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God, my God (Ruth 1:16b (NIV)).” When we trust in God, He will provide our every need, including in ways we could never foresee. Because Mrs. Price and Mrs. Byrd were so active, I doubt that they were lonely, but they were alone (not having close family)...so God placed these two widows in a new and unexpected family.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Please bless the widows and widowers, who believe they have no one. Throughout the Bible you tell believers to be generous and kind to widows and orphans. Please help us to provide loving arms to embrace and provide for their every need. In Jesus’ holy name we pray, Amen.

LEB

HOMELESS FAMILIES (Day 17)

Key Verse: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Matthew 25:35 [ESV]

Read: Proverb 3:27-28

When we walk down the street and see a homeless person, do we turn up our nose, thinking we’re better, or that his situation could never happen to any of us? What if we see a homeless family? Do we close our eyes, become haughty, and pretend they’re nowhere around? Who among us feel genuine compassion? Many people forget they’re just one paycheck away from homelessness themselves; the failure of Enron and the Great Recession has seemingly taught them nothing, not to mention the last government shutdown. Actually, it is in our best interest to help those who cannot help themselves. Proverbs 19:17 [ESV] tells us that, “*Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed [ESV].*” As Christians, it is our duty. And Jesus said to him, “*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head Matthew 8:20 [ESV].*” Sometimes, helping homeless people or a homeless family has nothing to do with money, but supplying them with resources which can simply be information or how-to-do something. For example, in the mid-1980 Ebony Magazine reported a story about a Los Angeles Church that encouraged its families to serve as mentors to families that were less fortunate.

While the saying, “*If you teach a man to fish...*” is erroneously attributed to the Bible, it does have wisdom in its words. Do you know of any jobs available to the homeless family, if that is the help they need? Do you know of any low cost housing or do you have knowledge to direct them to some rent-assisted programs? Sometimes helping doesn’t mean giving money. It may just mean thinking outside of the box. For example, we have a church member, who started a nonprofit organization that provides supplies and food items to homeless families and individuals. Also, we have a regular visitor to our church, who is in a position of influence who has caused shelters to be established to house students and their families. This individual also made washers and dryers to be placed in school buildings, which are available for the use of homeless families. Where do I have influence? What will I do?

Prayer: God, please provide shelter, warmth, and food to the homeless and downtrodden. Provide opportunities for those who wish to do better, and a special blessing for those who won’t or can’t realize the difference. Amen.

FJD

GROWING-UP FAST: EMANCIPATED MINORS (Day 18)

Key Verse: “When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.” I Corinthians 13:11[NLT]

Read: I Corinthians 13:11-13

From time to time, many teens fantasize about being emancipated; that is, they wonder what it would be like living away from their parents’ home and rules. They think about what it would be like living on their own, being in charge of themselves, and looking after their own well-being. In most states you are considered a child—a minor—under the legal status of your parents until you are eighteen years old. When you are emancipated you don’t need permission to sign a legally binding contract, get medical care, enroll in vocational or other post-secondary education, or engage in other activities that otherwise would require a parent’s permission.

Young people, in some cases, become automatically emancipated when they graduate from high school, enroll in a college or university, join the military, or get married at an early age. Many times youth are thrown into life situations that give them no choice but to become emancipated: Dysfunctional families, parents divorcing, parents dying, or it’s the only way to receive financial assistance to continue their education. Sometimes there is little consideration or thought put into the ramifications of entering into a life of making responsible decisions on their own. Until it happens, they often idealize it. They think of the freedom, the fun that they’ll have, not being restricted by parents. They may not think realistically about the bills, deadlines, and burdensome responsibilities that go along with freedom. Others may be fearful of what they’re about to experience.

Often, when parents train youth with a basic spiritual/moral background, and educate them in financial stewardship and responsibility, the transition of emancipation from their parents’ home may be easier; simply because they know how to pray, trust, and to ask God to guide their decision-making. Then the idea of leaving the nest can be easier for both the parents and the minor, especially if they remember the training from their youth, to keep God first in their life. Matthew 6:33 [ESV], says “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” Other times when we see young people, who are thrust into emancipation, not because they choose to, but because they have no other choice. Let’s reach out and try to hold them up. Whether we go out on our own early or later in life, we all make mistakes and bad decisions, so we all must rely on God’s help and provision. No matter how old we are, remember that we are never really emancipated. We must always rely on God. “Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting Rock (Isaiah 26:4 [ESV]).” The Prophet Jeremiah wrote, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, the plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11 [ESV]).”

Prayer: Dear Master, as a youth, I know that one day I will be on my own and I pray that you continue to be my provider and my counselor. Help me to remember the training of my youth, to keep you first in my life. Amen.

CEH

CO-HABITATING (Day 19)

Key Verse: “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.” Proverbs 19:22 [ESV]

Read: I Corinthians 7:1-3

It was called shackin’ back in the day, co-habitation between a male and a female. There was even an old adage that went along with it; although it was meant mainly as an insult for the woman: *“Why buy the cow, when you can get the milk for free?”* In other words, everything has been conveniently laid at his feet without having to work for it. There is no ring attached, no real commitment, and for many men and some women this means they will never commit. Because of our earthly desires, God knew that the opposite sex would be a distraction. This is why God told men in I Corinthians 7:1-40 to take a wife so there wouldn’t be any problems. God understands that a non-committed man can start problems. He may have no moral or social anchor; if you are going to play house you might as well BE family and do things the Biblical way. No, the Bible does not condone living together without being married, but it DOES state what a man’s duty is to his family, even if he is not officially committed.

First Timothy 5:8 [ESV] states *“But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”* Providing for your relatives just doesn’t mean financial help, it also means social and spiritual help. Going deeper into I Timothy 3:4 [ESV], we are told that man must, *“...manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive...”* Regardless whether a couple is cohabitating or not, their role should not change. If they are going to play a family, they need to start by attempting to do things Biblically. If they can’t, it might be an indication about the state of the relationship and its chances for survival.

Often you hear young people say they aren’t ready for the commitment of marriage; however, they will either talk about having children together or conceive and bear children. The commitment of marriage is supposed to be permanent, but it can be dissolved (not that it is to be taken lightly); however, children usually permanently tie the parents together in some way. Our families should have characteristics of our relationship with God—committed and permanent.

Prayer: God, though this couple is not legally wed, teach them their spiritual obligations to each other so they may be drawn to your word and ways. Watch out for both so they may come to you and realize your greatness. Once they realize your greatness, they will understand what they need to do as a couple. Amen.

FJD

AN EMPTY NEST (Part 1) (Day 20)

Key Verse: “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children...” Deuteronomy 6:6-7a [ESV]

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-7

When we think of an empty nest, we think of the time when baby birds have matured. They can fly and competently fend for themselves. Often the metaphor of an empty nest is used when all human children have moved out of their parents’ home. Ideally this happens after a child graduates from high school and goes off to college, technical school, the military, gets a good job and can emotionally and financially support themselves. Like birds, our job is to ready our children for independence. An important aspect of preparing children for life is teaching them about God, His Ways and His Plan of Salvation. This is not only the responsibility of parents: When a baby is blessed, the whole congregation promises to help nurture the child in the Lord. Moreover, parents have a duty to bring their children to church to give them other opportunities to learn the place that God should have in their lives.

Of course, we expect to put children through school to prepare them for life and work. Through this process, we need to stress the importance of work to take care of one’s self and one’s own children. I Thessalonians 3:10b [NIV] says “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” Too often today, we see adult children, who live at home and eat, but don’t contribute to the household in any way. Also, we see men who don’t work, who live off women.

To prepare our children for life, we must start teaching them as infants. When children are toddlers, they should be given simple chores. It doesn’t matter, at the beginning, whether they can do them adequately or not, but this can teach them the pride of work, personal responsibility, and the need for all household members to contribute to their home.

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for entrusting us with the greatest stewardship of all—nurturing and training our children. Please equip us to be effective teachers by word and deed. And let our children learn these valuable lessons. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

LEB

AN EMPTY NEST (Part 2) (Day 21)

Key Verse: “...And the two will become one flesh. They are no longer two but one flesh.” Mark 10:8 [NIV]

Read: Mark 10:6-9

I heard a sleep-deprived father of a newborn infant half-jokingly say, “I can’t wait to be an empty-nester.” I’ve also heard parents of teenagers state that they look forward to having their house to themselves. Parents express mixed feelings about their children moving out. Some express deep sadness that their children have left home, and others experience pride, love, longings, relief, joy, grief, and/or happiness.

Too often after children leave, parents feel lost. Their primary focus was raising children; now they don’t have children and child-centered activities to distract themselves from each other. Many parents did not nurture their relationship, while they were raising their children; as a result many of these empty-nesters realize that they no longer really know each other. What could they have done in the childrearing years or even today? Making a regular habit of praying and/or studying the Bible and/or Sunday School lesson together can help them to remain in-sync spiritually.

To improve the relationship, John Gottman (2015) the leading researcher and expert on marriage and relationships has prescribed the Magic Six Hours (per week) of togetherness—that busy couples can squeeze into their schedule. These activities include: **Partings**--Each of you sharing at least one thing that you anticipate happening during your day and kiss good-bye—just taking 2 minutes each work day; **Reunions** when you see each other at the end of the day—a 6-second kiss and a 20 minute stress reducing conversation (in the absence of the children and all media); Take 5 minutes a day to express **Appreciation and Admiration** for your partner—even consider writing it down in a journal so you both can look back. **Affection** is essential for feeling connected. This can include cuddling or hugging at bedtime, holding hands while watching television or walking—make sure you spend 5 minutes every day expressing nonsexual affection; **Date night**—it’s important to spend at least 2 hours a week on a date. A date doesn’t need to be expensive. It could include going to the free movie at the library and afterwards getting a cup of coffee. **State of the Union Talk**—spend one-hour per week at the same time each week to discuss what went well in the relationship and areas of concern. This time often helps couples to feel heard. (See *The Seven Principles for Making Marriages Work* by John Gottman and Nan Silver (2015) or go to www.gottman.com.) God has called us to be good stewards over what and whom he has given us. To give this attention to your relationship shows a commitment to love and growth. “Be devoted to each other in love...” Romans 12:10a. [NIV] “...Outdo one another in showing honor.” Romans 12:10b; ESV].

Prayer: Praise to the One, Who created all things, including marriage. Help me to show you and my spouse appreciation. Also, assist me in understanding that good relationships, including a good relationship with You, take work, time, and commitment. Amen.

LEB

FAMILY CHALLENGES

THE DIFFICULTY OF MARRIAGE (Day 22)

Key Verse: “For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.” Ephesian 5:23 [ESV]

Read: Ephesians 5:25-33

Many marriages run into problems; however, problems are supposed to bring couples closer through the adversities they face, not tear them apart. While both parties are equally responsible, the Bible makes it clear that the man is to lead in the family. As such, his role is paramount. Yet, oftentimes, it is us, as men, who are to blame for the failures in our relationships; we let egos and a lack of humility get in our way. The Bible states in Colossians 3:19 [ESV] that “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.” I Peter 3:7 [ESV] goes further by saying, “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”

Whenever we run into adversities in our relationship, men must ask themselves these questions: Am I approaching my wife in an understanding way? Am I being honorable? Honest? Humble in our dealings with one another? If the answer to any of these is no, then the Bible lets us know where the problem lay.

Men need to think of their marriage as a ship; the Bible is simply the map guiding where and how they go. Though many Christians are quick to point out that the Bible says women should submit to their mates, they also need to realize this is only applicable when paired with men who are leading mature Christian lives, doing what the Bible told them. It doesn't do a woman any good for her to follow an ungodly man; this is sort of like the blind leading the blind. The complaint that some women are too obstinate and independent sometimes come from men who are more secular than spiritual. Because they live in glass houses, problems arise when stones get thrown their way. If two married people are leading Godly lives, there should be fewer problems in their relationship; if only one is adhering to God's word, it is the man's Christian directive to right the ship. If he is the one who is lacking, then he either needs to comply or make way for a better man who will.

Prayer: God, please pass patience and understanding onto this couple as they embark on their new journey together. Let them turn to You and to themselves, knowing that's all they need to make it in this world. Teach both that a couple that is spiritually complete can compete in this world; even though, it sometimes appears to be insane. Teach them that the only true sanity is through your grace, God. Amen.

FJD

ONLY YOU (Day 23)

Key Verse: “ ...So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.” Malachi 2:15b [NIV]

Read: Malachi 2:14-16

The first commandment (Exodus 20:5) clearly states that God expects to be first in our lives—before anyone or anything else. If we’re married, God commands that our spouse is supposed to be our next priority—above other family, objects, and definitely should be the only person with whom we share our physical affection (Malachi 2:15b).

In the *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, Steiner, et. al. (2015) reported that 45-50% of married women and 50-60% of married men are unfaithful. A significant number of people are violating God’s laws for marriage. (And if the couple is not yet married, it’s important that they pledge fidelity—because if they aren’t faithful in courtship they’re unlikely to be faithful in marriage.) Why do so many people violate the fifth commandment, “You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).” One reason is that they don’t think through what it takes to be faithful. The first step is to thoughtfully vow to yourself and God that you intend to stay faithful; however, it’s important that you not become too smug in your vow, recognizing that anyone can fall. Therefore, you must continually ask God for His help in maintaining fidelity to your spouse. Most people enter marriage with the belief that they’ll be faithful; too often they don’t think through what this entails. There are a variety of reasons people cheat: One of the chief reasons is that they don’t make sure they’re not vulnerable. Married people should never be alone with individuals of the opposite sex, especially if they haven’t told their spouse about it. Being out drinking or using drugs without your spouse present also can make one vulnerable. Emotion is another reason people cheat. Women are more likely to cheat if they lack an emotional connection with their husbands. Men are more likely to cheat if they have strong unexpressed emotions, like anger, hurt, or humiliation. Having connections and affairs with another person may initially feel like a salve, allowing negative feelings arising within one’s relationship to be avoided or covered-up. Just as we must talk to God and pray to be close to Him, we must openly talk about our feelings, thoughts, hurts, disappointments, hopes and plans with our spouse. Open communication fosters an emotionally intimate relationship. No matter how hard it might be to talk, especially for many men, it’s necessary. Culture sometimes normalizes having affairs. In some families, affairs are rampant, thus seem to be the norm. And in some professions, such as athletics, executives in business, the military, and paramilitary, affairs are the norm. It’s also important to be aware that too much locker-room, beauty parlor, barber shop talk, and media can desensitize one to the ways of the world. We must operate in accordance to God’s laws and not the standards of our family, colleagues or friends. That’s why it’s important to be in the world but not of the world.

Some people fall into affairs when they find out how hard marriage is, falsely believing that everyone else is having an easy time. This disenchantment with their marriage makes some people vulnerable to infidelity. They bought the American myth that “love conquers all,” not understanding the marriage takes ongoing HARD work. A friend told me that she became happy with her marriage after being married more than a decade and she decided that her marriage was like a ministry that took commitment and sustained hard work. Also when God gives us a ministry we should rely on Him, not ourselves to succeed. We have to give God our relationship.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for marriage. Please help us to dedicate ourselves to only you and to my spouse. And if we’re not married, Lord, help us to be supportive of marriage. Amen.

LEB

TRUST IN THE GREAT PHYSICIAN: COPING WITH CANCER (Day 24)

Key Verse: “So do not fear, for I am with you: do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous hand.” Isaiah 41:10 [NIV]

Read: James 5:14-16

“You have cancer.” These are three words that can change the lives of you and your family forever. This word, “cancer,” brings so many emotions if it is referring to either you or someone you love and hold dear. I remember the day cancer came knocking. This poem explains my journey with cancer. I experienced fear, anxiety, pride, dignity, strength, compassion, kindness, and love. God, however, helped me to be a conqueror! I am a survivor, who lives today to tell my story

Victimized by Cancer

I remember the day Cancer came knocking-
I asked Fear to answer the door, but he was afraid of the mighty bully, Cancer.
So Anxiety stood by his side.
They peered as Cancer knocked louder.
I thought they were going to hide.
I asked Pride to get the door, but Fear kept pulling him back.
Anxiety wept like a little child who was having a mild attack.
I called on Dignity to answer the door as Cancer knocked louder.
But Fear kept weeping and wailing and Anxiety had another attack.
I finally called on Strength to answer the door and he looked Cancer straight in the eye.
“I must ask you to leave,” said Strength and the bully, Cancer seemed to shiver and die.
Anxiety and Fear also left, but Compassion was now at the door.
Kindness and Love stood with Compassion.
They waved goodbye to Anxiety and Fear forever.
Cancer the mighty bully was gone.
(Adapted from *Cancer Came Knocking* by Gayle Stanley)

God does not give us the spirit of fear, but enables us with His healing powers, love, self-discipline, and protection when crisis rises [II Timothy 1:7]. God remains the Great Healer and Physician. We see many examples of God/Jesus’ healing powers throughout the Bible. Moreover, whatever the outcome, God can bless cancer patients and survivors with the “peace that surpasses understanding” Philipians 4:7 [KJV].

Prayer: Heavenly Father, be with all CANCER victims. Empower them with hope, surround them with loving care and support as you bless and keep them each day. Send your Guardian Angel and Holy Spirit to comfort them. Let them trust you for healing. Amen!

KLR

A FAMILY'S CRISIS: COPING WITH DEATH (Day 25)

Key Verse: "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me." John 14:1 [KJV]

Read: Revelation 21:4, Psalm 23:4

The pain leading to the death of a loved one is something we all must face at some point in our lives. While grief is an expected response to a significant loss, the unfamiliar emotions that arise can lead one to feelings of helplessness, fear and isolation. As Christians, we can find hope in God and use Him as a source of comfort when dealing with the death of a loved one. There are some basic truths that God wants us to understand. These basic truths will help one cope with a loss, and move forward when one is ready to do so. The basic truths are: Understand that we all grieve differently. Understand that Christians are not exempt from pain and suffering. Understand that God is always there with you through the pain. One factor that enables patients and their caregivers to cope better is having a Christian faith, which encourages a more positive outlook on how death affects one's life. Religion can also be a means of resolving the existential uncertainty of what comes after life on earth. The Bible has a lot to say about death and dying, and some of these Bible verses can help you when dealing with the pain of losing your loved one. Meditate on these verses, and pray to God about how the words speak to you. John 11:25 [KJV]: "Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." John 3:16 [KJV]: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 14:3 [KJV]: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Romans 8:11 [KJV]: "But if the spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." John 8:51 [KJV]: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keeps my saying, he shall never see death." The death of a loved one can be a shattering experience with devastating implications. As difficult as the loss may be, it is possible to move forward with hope for the future. Be mindful during this moment of bereavement, God is standing with open arms to console you! Remember: "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death: I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" Psalm 23 [KJV].

Prayer: Lord Jesu, You willingly gave yourself up to death, so that all might be saved and pass from death to life. Please help me to face death with hope in You. Amen.

KLR

CHRISTIAN FUNDAMENTALS

DON'T LOOK BACK (Day 26)

Key Verse: “And we know that all things work together for good for them who love God for them who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28 [KJV].)

Read: II Corinthians 1:2-7

How often does one wonder why s/he's at a standstill or an idle place in his or her life? They may be stuck in a place constantly thinking of past experience that they thought were happy times, but yet sad causing him or her not to move forward in life. Rise above the past and move forward. When one finds himself in this situation, anxiety is apt to arise. **“Don't look back,”** but move ahead with God. Let a future with God transform your life. He can allow, the not so happy experiences of the past turn into healthy and learning ones. Especially if we remember Paul's words, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28 [KJV]). Why not seek out a friend who is Christ-like, for a prayer partner, one that will help to give you spiritual courage that is lacking in your life--a prayer partner, who will pray with you and help to lead you to God.

When you get to know God, accept Him, and study His word. There, the burden of anxiety will find another home. It will no longer allow you to become the unhappy and hopeless person that has caused you not to be able to move forward with your life, simply, because you were dwelling in the past. When you get to know God, He will be your friend. Anytime, something tries to get a hold of your thoughts and keeps you in an unproductive place, all you need to do is talk to God in prayer. Always keep your mind on Him and don't look back. He will surely keep your heart and mind clear of those things that kept you in an unhappy state of mind and from moving forward. Just **“don't look back”** on past experiences that are unhealthy.

So many people are stuck in situations because they don't know how to move forward with their lives. They think that what they had in the past is the only way to go. So instead of moving forward, they keep looking back at what once was, thus, keeping themselves from progressing. They become stagnated. That is when they need to seek God's help. Have you ever had to show someone the way to God to learn how to **not looking back?**

Scripture: **1 Peter 5:7 [ESV] says, ‘...casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.’**

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, thank you, for the gift of a discerning spirit to know, how to continue to move forward, rather than looking back on those things that can be a hindrance to ones success in life. Amen.

CEH

DON'T LISTEN TO FOOLISH TALK (Day 27)

Key Verse: “Don’t listen to foolish talk as such; for bad company corrupts good character.” I Corinthians 15:33

Read: Ephesians 4:29; I Corinthians 1:20-25

Many times, we are faced with “foolish talk” and temptations from unsaved friends and acquaintances who try to corrupt or change our Biblical faith and belief. Sometimes they are not so easily identified as “right or wrong.”

God has given us the Bible by inspiration to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives, thus arming us to do what is right. We are to practice the will of discernment, by knowing what is of God, by not allowing “foolish talk” to enter into our character.

When we are living in the Spirit of God, He will give us strength to recognize deceit of those who are not of Him. Therefore when we constantly read and stay in His word we are equipped with His knowledge and have the ability to reject false doctrine that others try to bestow upon our faith in God.

Even so, we are to watch, pray and stay in the Spirit of God with obedience to his word, as not to become weak and let “foolish talk” distort our faith. By all means don’t be tempted from His word and from His will by foolish talk, of unbelievers or unsaved friends. Immediately we are to direct our thoughts back to God our Savior and remember the teachings of His word. Parents protect your children from foolish talk.

When others try to convince you otherwise of what thus, said the Lord. “Foolish talk,” mainly by distorting God’s word with those things that are not of sound Biblical doctrine. By all means possible without hesitation stand your ground and direct him to Bible Scripture which is God’s word.

Ephesians 4:29—When you talk, to not say harmful things, but say what people need, including words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will benefit those who listen to you.

Prayer: Father God, bless me with greater wisdom. Grant me a sound mind and a hopeful heart, that I will not succumb to foolish thoughts and ideas that are not of thee. Amen.

CEH

A PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY...TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT GOD (Day 28)

Key Verse: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6 [KJV]

Read: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITY IN THE TRAINING PROCESS INVOLVES TEACHING:

Pray – Parents should teach their children to pray often (when they wake up, during the day, before tests, at meals, at night, for friends, etc.) "Pray without ceasing." I Thessalonians 5:17 [KJV]

The Bible – Parents should read to their children an age appropriate version of the Bible (Children's Bible and/or Bible story books) and **teach** them that Jesus expects them to obey His laws and authority, just as He expects parents, and other responsible adults to obey. "All scriptures is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Timothy 3:16-17 [KJV]

The Church –Parents should take their children to church. They should teach them that we go to church as a family; to be with others who love Jesus and who want to learn about Him. "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:15 [KJV]

Example - Lead by example, if you want your children to know and love Jesus. Let them see you reading your Bible and praying. They aren't going to listen to you about how important prayer and Bible study are, if they never see you doing it. If all your Bible does at home is collect dust, most likely that is what your child's Bible will do. "Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works and in your teaching show integrity dignity" 1 Timothy 4:12 [ESV].

Relate - Show them how the Bible relates to them, and how they can apply God's Word in their own life. How can the things they learn from you and in church, work in school or when they are with their friends? "Show me your ways, Lord teach me your paths". Psalm 25:4 [NIV]

Teach - Teach your children to show others their love for Jesus, not just with words but with action. Model this for them, by the way you treat others. "And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." Deuteronomy 6:6-7 [ESV]

Converse - Make sure your daily conversations have evidence of your faith. Your child is listening! "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good for the use of edifying, it may minister grace unto the hearers" Ephesians 4:29 [KJV].

Live -Live what you believe. That is the most powerful tool in teaching your child that Christ is real in your life and can be real in theirs! "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. Matthew 5-16 [KJV]

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we pray for this new generation, the children of today. Shine your truth into their hearts. May they hear you in music, see you in art and experience you through the love and care of family, friends and teachers. Build your hope into their lives. Amen.

FAMILY TIME: EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY (Day 29)

Key Verse: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” II Timothy 3:16. [KJV]

Read: II Corinthians 3:14-17

The **B.I.B.L.E.** is **B**asic **I**nstruction **B**efore **L**eaving **E**arth! The Bible’s exhortations, guidelines, commandments and parables give us concrete and infallible insight into God’s will for every aspect of our lives. The Bible is our nourishment. Imagine that you go a day without eating anything. Then a week you continue the same eating pattern. Then it continues on for a month. As time goes on, you become weaker and weaker. Our bodies need nourishment to live. It’s the same in our spiritual lives. If we want to gain life and nourishment for our spiritual growth, it is essential that we spend time with God’s Word. When The Holy Bible, God’s Word, is read and obeyed, it leads to unimaginable spiritual growth and gives us directions and purpose. The Holy Word orders our steps as we journey in our walk with Jesus Christ.

Tips on Reading the Bible Daily

Reading the Bible Makes Us Much Wiser: The Bible offers many topics. It’s a book full of real life issues that we are confronted with daily. The Bible offers us a Spiritual Map to follow. This Spiritual Map will equip us with tools, guided by God that will encourage us to live a Christ-Centered Life. When we read the Bible, we become wiser, and we can make better choices that will affect our everyday life. Read the Bible every day and you will grow spiritually. Let God guide your life!

Reading the Bible Helps Us Overcome Sin and Temptations: We all face temptations to sin every day. When we read our Bible, we get advice on how to approach situations and overcome sin and the temptations we encounter. As we read the Bible, we will understand what we’re supposed to do, rather than just guessing and hoping we get it right. We are given explicit instructions, commandments and real life examples as to appropriate vs. inappropriate values, morals, and behaviors to apply. By reading the Bible, we learn how to be victorious and how to conquer sin and temptations.

Reading the Bible Gives Us Directions: Sometimes our lives can feel a little like we’re just wandering uselessly with no direction. When we read our Bible we can clearly see that God has a purpose for us. His words can give us directions. We should ask God to order our steps, so we can achieve His goals for our lives. As we engage in following God’s directions, Philippians 4:13 [KJV] sums it up, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.” God will guide as we read and learn His Will.

Reading the Bible Builds Relationship with God: Our relationship with God should be of significant interest to us. This should be the number one priority in our lives. The Bible gives us insight into God’s Divine Word. In an effort to build a relationship with God, Prayer is important and a means for us to communicate with Him. Ask God to come into your heart so you can have a closer and personal relationship with Him. We can grow in an understanding of God, as we read and grasp His Word. THE BIBLE WILL ASSURE, GUIDE, COUNSEL, RESTORE, WARN, NOURISH, JUDGE, SANCTIFY, FREE, ENRICH, PROTECT, STRENGTHEN, AND STABILIZE US! Spending family time together and applying/studying Biblical Doctrine will help us grow spiritually.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, Please give us a thirst for Your Holy Word and help us to desire to apply it. Fill us with your wisdom and knowledge, in order to lead a life pleasing to you. Amen.

BENEFITS OF A FAMILY HAVING A PRAYER LIFE (Day 30)

Key Verse: “Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” I Thessalonians 5:17 [NIV]

Read: Matthew 6:9-15

Prayer is communion with God. It is through prayer that we approach the throne of God with our praises, confessions, requests and thanks. Remember “Little prayer, little power; much prayer much power.” Keep in mind...”Prayer works!”

Prayer Helps You Understand God’s Will

God has a plan for you. Through prayer, you could come to know God in a personal way and then be encouraged to live a Christ-Centered Life. Prayer provides a way to communicate with God. Furthermore, prayer will strengthen your spiritual walk. Daily, pray to God for a clear understanding of His plan for you. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11 [NIV]

Prayer Solves Problems

Got a problem? Pray about it. Prayer is, therefore, the highest path to real problem solving. God understands every situation and can provide an answer. Confess to the Lord and expect a response. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your request to God.” Philippians .4:6 [NIV]

Prayer Brings Peace of Mind

God wants us to have peace of mind and to know that everything will work out to the good of those who trust and believe in Him. If we rely on God, He will give us perfect peace. “You will keep in perfect peace, those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You” Isaiah 26:3. [NIV]

Prayer Allows Us to Ask for Forgiveness of Our Sins

Confession is necessary to receive forgiveness for wrongdoing from God. When we pray and confess, God forgives us of our sins and our relationship with Him is restored. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” I John 1:9 [NIV]

Prayer is needed in our Christian walk with God. When we pray to God we will receive understanding of His will, our problems will be solved, God will comfort and enable us to have peace of mind, as He will also forgive us of our sins.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, We love to spend time, fellowship, and enjoy your presence in prayer! Amen.

KLR

WHATEVER IT IS, GIVE IT TO GOD (Day 31)

Key Verse: I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Psalm 32:8 [ESV]

Read: Proverbs 2:1-5

Making decisions on our own can be disastrous or can leave us empty with no sense of direction or no clear thoughts or understanding of what is the best for that particular purpose. Many times we lack the ability to be decisive regarding things that are dear to us. We need to be aware of the choices we make, and not go against the things God would have us do. We need to ask God to transform our way of thinking, to look to Him and know that He will give us divine guidance in making difficult or simple decisions—actually every decision. We need to be wise in the choices we make, no matter what the situation. ***“Whatever it is, give it to God.”*** When we look to God and seek His wisdom with confidence, we will get the perfect bit of advice for the decision we are trying to make. Sometimes we feel overwhelmed with a sense of urgency in decision making, but no sense of direction. Yet, we go ahead doing things on our own without consulting God. Then we wonder why things don't go as we hope. We must turn to God in prayer, through every life circumstance. ***“Whatever it is, give it to God.”*** Sometimes letting God lead in decision-making, which means being patient—waiting.

As parents, we should teach our children to make good decisions. Our children can benefit from us discussing decisions with which they are wrestling. As appropriate, we can share good and bad decisions we made, especially as young people. We should instruct them in Christian decision making and show them by example. Let them see and hear us praying over decisions. Many of us can remember seeing our parents and grandparents praying over and/or discussing decisions.

Proverbs 19:20 [ESV] advises, “Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.” And Proverb 13:13 [ESV] warns “Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded.”

Can you remember the times in your life when you were faced with a difficult decision and you gave it to God through prayer, and he handled it and you were victorious because of it?

Prayer: Dear God, let us be mindful that you are near: That no task is too hard for You; We pray that you will keep us from all harm. We must give You our worries.. Amen.

CEH

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THE ROMAN ROAD

(Plan of Salvation Using Scripture from the Book of Romans)

What Must I Do to be Saved (to spend eternity with God in Heaven)?

The Plan of Salvation or the Gospel message is simple:

- First, we must believe that we are all sinners and sin has separated us from God (For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23).
- There is an eternal consequence or punishment that we all deserve because of our sins (The wages of sin is death [permanent separation from God in hell]. Romans 6:23a)
- God loves us and made provisions for Jesus to take our punishment and forgive us (God loved us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8)
- The scripture says, “That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Roman 10:9).”

The Gospel message is—Believe (that Jesus is God’s Son who lived, died for your sins, was resurrected, and now resides in Heaven with God the Father). Repent (ask for forgiveness, make a decision to turn from your sinful life and live by God’s standards); Confess (acknowledge and pray that you want Jesus to be the ruler of your life); and Inherit Eternal Life. You are now my Lord and Savior.

A Prayer of Salvation: Dear Lord Jesus, Please forgive me for my sins. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. Come into my life. Help me to turn toward you and away from sin. Assist me in living the rest of my life for you. Thank you now for being my Lord and Savior and sending Your Holy Spirit to permanently reside within me. Amen.